

Introduction

After almost nine decades, the typology of soteriologies, introduced by the Swedish Lutheran Gustaf Aulén in his *Christus Victor*,¹ continues to orient students of the topic.² Aulén proposed that the history of soteriology exhibits three main types. The patristic motif from which he drew his title dominated the first millennium of Christian thought, while objective theories came on the scene in the eleventh century with Anselm of Canterbury. Subjective theories, adumbrated in counter-point to Anselm by Peter Abelard, found their champions among modern Protestant liberals. For Aulén, the types stand in competition with one another. His own intent was to vindicate the normative status of the patristic motif, to claim Martin Luther as its last and culminating exponent, and thus, to distance Luther from the objective theory of Protestant Orthodoxy while winning for him the title of authentic evangelical catholicism. The pages that follow honor Aulén's intuition that biblical and patristic soteriologies differ in kind from what followed, but they also explore the possibility that his three types, rather than representing exclusive options, signal the emergence of distinct stages in a genetic sequence. In that sequence, the achievement of each stage is preserved while the limits of each stage calls forth the next.

1. G. Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Herbert (New York: Macmillan, 1969). The original appeared in 1931.
2. See, for example, Nicholas E. Lombardo, O. P., *The Father's Will: Christ's Crucifixion and the Goodness of God* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 12.

The inspiration for this approach lies in the thought of Bernard Lonergan S.J., especially in his suggestion that Western culture has passed through what he calls three stages of meaning.³ The background for this proposal lies, first of all, in Lonergan's elaboration of transcendental or generalized empirical method, an account of the normative pattern of conscious and intentional operations through which human beings come to know the real and discern and act to realize the good.⁴ On this basis, in the third chapter of *Method in Theology*, he sketches a comprehensive theory of meaning, its carriers, the sources from which it is gleaned, the acts by which it is accessed, the outcome or terms of those acts, and the functions meaning performs. All of this leads up to the discernment of distinct realms of meaning and the stages through which meaning moves from one realm to the next. Several quite diverse sources seem to have informed Lonergan's account of the realms and stages of meaning. Aristotle and Aquinas alerted him to the distinction between descriptive understanding and explanatory understanding.⁵ In mathematics, Gödel recognized that, given any set of definitions and postulates, questions will arise, which cannot be answered on the basis of that set, requiring one to advance to a higher viewpoint.⁶ The psychologist Piaget observed that children develop skills by mastering and grouping particular operations, adapting those groups to meet new demands, and grouping these further groups in a cumulative process of advancement that exhibits distinct stages.⁷

For Lonergan, the stages of meaning are three, and what distinguishes them is the manner in which the transcendental or generalized empirical method is wielded. In Lonergan's account of that

3. B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 85–99.

4. For his elaboration of transcendental method, see B. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 3, Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) and the summary in the first chapter of *Method in Theology*.

5. See Lonergan, *Insight*, 368–69.

6. On Gödel, see Lonergan, *Insight*, 19–20, and *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 18, Philip J. McShane, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 49–62.

7. On Piaget, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 27–29.

method, knowing is achieved by a correct judgment about the relevance of a possible understanding to the data from which inquiry arises. Thus, knowing is a self-assembling whole, involving activities on the respective levels of experience, understanding, and judgment. Beyond cognition lies the arena of responsible action. Among the realities known are possible courses of action. These evoke repulsion or inclination—the matter for evaluative discernment that leads to a judgment of value, upon which the decision to act may follow. For Lonergan, this method is normative, yielding a set of transcendental precepts: be attentive to the relevant data, be intelligent in grasping the intelligibility of those data, be rational in judging the sufficiency of evidence for the relevance of that understanding to the data yielded by experience, and be responsible. The recurrent observance of those precepts leads to cumulative results in the ongoing process whereby human beings forge societies and cultures.

When the transcendental method is brought to bear on problems of practical living, there develops a fund of common sense—Lonergan's first stage and realm of meaning. This fund varies from time to time and place to place; it is contextual, and even, quite particular. A farmer's know-how differs from a plumber's, and every student needs to learn to find her way around the university unit in which she enrolls. Common sense is also cumulative and can become enormously sophisticated. It enabled the survival of primitive hunters and gatherers, and it also powered the rise of ancient civilizations. What defines and limits common sense is its practicality. It enables men and women, and whole societies, to deal with reality as it impinges on their experience, with what Aquinas termed the *priora quoad nos*, what is first with respect to us. This perspective, in turn, renders common sense understanding descriptive. So, for example, we observe a sunrise or determine which phase of its monthly cycle the moon has entered.

Common sense knowledge does not exhaust the eros of the human mind. A jug of water can be heavy or light, depending on how strong one is and for how long and in what position one holds it. An object can feel warm or cold, depending on the previous ambience of one's

hand. One may ask why one experiences things the way one does, and with that question one moves from Aquinas's *priora quoad nos* toward an account of the *priora quoad se*, of things not in relation to us, but in relation to one another, to what is first not in our experience, but in being. With that question, the path opens to Lonergan's second realm and stage of meaning—systematic theory. Lonergan credits the ancient Greeks, with their quest for the ultimate principles of things, with discovering this realm, and he finds that Christian thought entered it with the medieval differentiation of theology from its symbolic matrix, while modern empirical natural science provides still a third instance. Theoretic explanatory knowledge requires a technically precise language. Aristotelians write of form and matter; theologians, of processions and relations in the Trinity; physicists of temperature and mass, rather than warmth or heft.

The deployment of a transcendental method that opens access to the realm of theory brings with it a danger. Those initiated into its *arcana* can deem themselves the sole masters of the really real, denigrating the common sense apprehension of reality as ignorance. People of common sense, on the contrary, can dismiss explanatory understanding as counter-intuitive, its specialized vocabulary as incomprehensible, and the entire enterprise as impractical—as “just theory.”

The tension, and, at times, apparent contradiction between common sense and theory signals the emergence of a new, critical, and methodical, exigence, the need for a basis upon which the relative autonomy, validity, and relations among common sense, theory in its metaphysical and empirical scientific forms, and, we may add, critical history, can be established. To this high end, Lonergan brings the modern turn to the subject to full term. Guided by the results of his investigation of Aquinas's theory of knowledge,⁸ he pursues an analysis of human intentionality, the operations that comprise it, and the immanent norms that govern it, which yields his account of

8. Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 2, Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

transcendental or generalized empirical method. In so doing, he differentiates a further realm of meaning, the realm of interiority, and with it, he provides the non-foundationalist foundation for a third stage of meaning.

In each stage of meaning, the operations that comprise transcendental method come into play. Experience, understanding, judgment, and decision engage with reality as it poses the practical problems of living to generate a fund of common sense. The drive to understand leads beyond common sense into the realm of theory, and here, the operations are formalized, as it were. Modern empirical science, for example, takes its start by measuring the data of experience on a mathematical template, taking as its guide initial hypotheses regarding the intelligibility of those data, and it goes on to devise and perform experiments to test the actual relevance of those hypotheses to the data. In response to the further critical exigence, one shifts one's attention from the external objects of intentionality to its operations as one seeks to reflectively appropriate them. This involves a delicate and arduous reduplicative process wherein one attends to one's experience of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding, seeks to understand each in its distinction from and relation to the other, judges the correctness of that understanding, and commits oneself to the normativity of that understanding of knowing and deciding, of the real and the good. In each realm of meaning, the transcendental method—with its immanent norms—is operative, but, beginning with common sense, the limits of one stage present an exigence that calls forth the development of a new grouping or pattern of the basic set of operations that, in turn, provides access to a further realm of meaning.

The studies that follow explore how Lonergan's notion of stages of meaning may both illumine the development of the Christian soteriological tradition and clarify the present theological task of mediating Christ's redemptive significance in the contemporary cultural matrix. Lonergan's notion would suggest that Christian soteriology took its rise with a common sense mediation of the

redemptive significance of Jesus of Nazareth, that it developed a systematic-theoretic mediation of that same meaning, and that, subsequently, it has been moving into a further mode of understanding, contingent upon the differentiation, in addition to the realms of common sense and theory, of the realm of interiority. This suggestion will be concretized by attending, first, to Irenaeus of Lyons, then to Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas, and finally, to Martin Luther, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Lonergan himself. The superstructure governing this choice of representative figures lies in the succession of stages of meaning, each of which can be defined by a question or set of questions that, when answered, opens up a further set that requires a different mode of thought, and thus, propels theological inquiry into the succeeding stage. To anticipate, our questions will be three in number. First, what's the story? Second, how is the plot of the story intelligible? Third, what generates the story and makes it a saving story?

An overview of how these questions play out may be helpful. First, then, what's the story? This was the fundamental point at issue between Irenaeus and the various gnostics with whom he contended. Lauded by Johannes Quasten as "the founder of Christian theology" for the comprehensiveness of his exposition of the Christian faith,⁹ Irenaeus, we shall suggest, rose to meet the challenge of gnostic myth by weaving from his sources, in Scripture and earlier Christian thinkers, a symbolic counter-narrative structured by the Pauline notions of dispensation, recapitulation, and the Christ-Adam typology. Put forth as the true story of God and God's redemptive dealings with humankind, his narrative integrates Old and New Testaments and embraces the entire sweep of history from creation to the *eschaton*. Irenaeus's significance derives chiefly from this artifact, the comprehensive counter-myth that evokes and expresses the world within which Christians dwell. His soteriology consists first of all in this story of salvation that, when appropriated in faith, becomes a saving story.

9. J. Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. 1 (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1950), 294.

There is also the soteriology within Irenaeus's story. Aulén's *Christus Victor* motif does appear in the *Adversus Haereses*,¹⁰ but each time it occurs, it functions within a larger complex. For Irenaeus, the incarnation is the necessary condition for the revelatory role by which Christ imparts salvific, transformative knowledge of the Father's love. That role culminates on the cross, conceived by Irenaeus in Johannine fashion as the lifting up of Christ, whereby he draws all persons to himself. Within this larger context, Christ's revelation of the truth about God and God's saving intent for humankind conquers Satan by exposing his lies, and thus, depriving him of his power. The martial imagery of the *Christus Victor* motif is subsumed into a broader soteriology in which the practical exercise of discipleship, the obedient following of Christ, who was obedient unto death, forms human beings in Christ's image, and thus, brings the race to maturity, rendering it capable at last of receiving the gifts of incorruptibility and immortality for which God had created it in the beginning.

In his *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm of Canterbury takes the Christian story for granted and asks a question different from Irenaeus's—not whether the Son of God became human, suffered, and died for our sins, but why. Reviewing the previous tradition, he finds the patristic elaborations of Paul's Christ-Adam typology inadequate to penetrate to the *ratio et necessitas* of Christ's redemptive death while the popular notion of the devil's rights is simply wrong. Anselm sets out to innovate, drawing upon his inherited Augustinian-Platonic worldview to forge a systematic *Begrifflichkeit*, an interlocking, mutually defining set of technically precise terms grounded in a metaphysics, in order to grasp the intelligibility of Christ's redemptive death. In this manner, we shall suggest, Anselm moved soteriology beyond symbolic narrative to the mode of theory, and it is the difference between these modes of discourse that constitutes the difference between the object of Anselm's inquiry and the patristic materials that he found wanting.

Aquinas, in turn, integrated Anselm's innovation within a far more ambitious project. In the prologue to the *Summa theologiae*, he

10. See, for example, 2.20.3, the preface to the fifth book, and 5.21.1–3.

undertook to deal with “everything that pertains to the Christian religion,” and he will do so according to the *ordo disciplinae*. The latter term he draws from Aristotle, for whom it designated explanatory rather than common sense, descriptive understanding—understanding that begins from what is first in the order of being as opposed to what is first in the order of experience. What is first in the order of being, of course, is God, and there, Aquinas begins, with God in Godself, one and triune, and from there, he traces the procession of creatures from God and their return to God through Christ. Devoting the third and final part of his *Summa* to the latter, he again begins with what is first in the order of being and offers an account of Christ’s ontological composition as defined by the Council of Chalcedon. This ontological account then serves as a hermeneutical key as he draws upon the scriptural and creedal narrative to explore how everything that Christ did and underwent was for the sake of our salvation. When Aquinas comes to Christ’s passion, he clarifies the ambiguity of Anselm’s quest for “necessary reasons” and modifies Anselm’s notion of satisfaction, binding it to Christ’s human love and obedience and relating that human love to the primacy of divine causality.

Famously controversial, when Martin Luther comes to Galatians 3:13 in his 1535 *Commentary on Galatians*, he launches into a vigorous attack on “Jerome and the popish sophists.” They explain away Paul’s clear statement that Christ became a curse for us, and with their spirituality of imitation of the sinless Christ as the outflow of love informed by charity, they deny true knowledge of Christ and obviate the experience of justification by faith alone. Jerome and the popish sophists are agents of Satan.

If it is clear what Luther opposes, what the positive side of the coin might be has provoked debate among his commentators. Lutheran Orthodoxy invoked his authority for a clear theory of penal substitution. Aulén challenged this tradition, claiming that Luther revived the classic *Christus Victor* motif—a motif which, because of its dramatic, dualistic, contradictory character, is not amenable to theoretic articulation. Paul Althaus, in turn, echoed the earlier

research of Theodosius Harnack when, *pace* Aulén, he placed Luther squarely in the Latin line of theory inaugurated by Anselm.¹¹

Otto Hermann Pesch offers an insight that sheds new light on the issue. At the close of his magisterial comparison of Luther and Aquinas on justification, he suggests that the two differ, not simply on the level of explicit statement, but at the fundamental level of *Denkvollzugsform*, the pattern of their cognitive performance. Luther's mode of thought, he proposes, is existential; Aquinas's, sapiential. Hence, in a sense, Aquinas takes up where Luther leaves off.¹² In Lonergan's terms, this would mean that Luther operates within the realm of common sense, Aquinas in that of theory. If this is so, then at the level of *Denkvollzugsform*, Aulén is largely correct. Luther's thought is indeed dramatic, dualistic, and resolutely non-theoretic. Thus, Karin Bornkamm observes how, in his *Commentary*, Luther's rhetoric plunges his reader directly into the story of Christ in such fashion that the reader, by participating in the story, experiences justification by faith.¹³

What erupts powerfully in Luther is a reversion to the first-order symbolic discourse of religious experience, discourse flowing from and expressing the transformation of consciousness affected by religious conversion mediated by the story of Christ. Luther insists that the events narrated in the story occur *huper hēmōn*, for us. They only occur for us, however, when they are enacted in the consciousness of the believer. When Luther dramatizes a conflict between God's wrath and God's love, he is naming the psychologically charged polarities that he himself had to negotiate. Fallen humankind perceives God as an angry judge and implacable lawgiver, but, Luther learned to believe, in becoming sin and a curse for us, Christ exchanged what is his for what belongs to us. Clinging to Christ in faith, we find freedom.

Luther is not simply recounting the story of salvation, nor is he,

11. P. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 202.

12. O. H. Pesch, *Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin. Versuch ein systematisch-theologischen Dialogs* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1967), 933.

13. K. Bornkamm, *Luthers Auslegungen des Galaterbriefes von 1519 bis 1531—Ein Vergleich* (Berlin, 1963), 166–67, cited in Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 273.

by any means, seeking a theoretic articulation of the intelligibility of that story. Luther's text opens quite directly, if spontaneously and indeliberately, onto the world of human interiority and the process of the transformation of consciousness that constitutes Christian conversion, the process evoked by Jesus that generated the story at the outset and continues to be mediated by it.

What we find spontaneous in Luther becomes explicit in Friedrich Schleiermacher. With Schleiermacher, theology begins deliberately and self-consciously to thematize its source in the religiously converted human being. What Christians experience, for Schleiermacher, is the work of Christ transforming their consciousness. With regard to the question of how Christ acts redemptively to transform us, Schleiermacher distinguishes his position from those he labels empirical, on one front, and magical, on another. Empirical positions reduce Christ's redemptive activity to the teaching and example that inspire us to grow in perfection. Here, of course, Schleiermacher has in mind Immanuel Kant, who reduced religion to morality and theology to philosophy, and whose influence would linger on in major nineteenth-century Protestant liberals. Magical views, on the contrary, posit a direct and immediate action of Christ on the individual in her interiority, a supernatural intervention. Schleiermacher seeks a dialectical mediation of these poles. From the empirical view, he accepts tradition and community as historically mediating the redemptive activity of Christ, but with the supernaturalists, he rejects the reductionist tendency of the latter. Exemplarity is too flat a category, inadequate to express the reality that the redemptive transformation mediated by the historic community is, at the same time, the reality of God operating in history and upon the individual.

Schleiermacher had the merit of articulating a new question to define a further stage in the development of Christian understanding of the doctrine of the work of Christ. What is the transformation of consciousness, evoked by Jesus, first in his earthly ministry, and now, through the mediation of the life, beliefs, and practices of the Christian

community, that generated the story, that creates the horizon within which the intelligibility of the story can be determined, and that provides the criteria for judging the authenticity of conflicting interpretations of the story? Yet, if Schleiermacher identified the question, his own response remained mired in the misadventures of modern thought since Descartes as it has sought to negotiate the turn to the subject. Schleiermacher's response was encumbered by a truncated notion of truth and objectivity, justifiably attracting the charge of experiential-expressivism leveled at him.¹⁴

Bernard Lonergan is best known for his work on the theory of knowledge and theological method. He did, however, address soteriology in the course of his seminary teaching at the Gregorian University in Rome. The neoscholastic Christology manual generally concluded with soteriology, and Lonergan followed this convention when he devoted the final three theses of his Latin textbook to the topic. It also occurs in supplementary materials and notes he composed in the same academic context. In the first two of these theses, Lonergan deals with scripture, and then, the traditional category of satisfaction, but in the third, he drives beyond the received tradition. In that thesis, he raises the question of the *convenientia* of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Lonergan takes *convenientia* to designate the intelligibility of a contingent matter of fact. That intelligibility, he proposes, lies in the Law of the Cross, a three-step principle of transformation. Sin, he states, echoing St. Paul, incurs the penalty of death, but this dying, if accepted out of love, is transformed, and this transformed dying receives the blessing of new life. This law articulates the intrinsic intelligibility of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. It is, Lonergan writes, the essence of redemption.

The full significance of the Law of the Cross exceeds the confines of Lonergan's Latin textbook. For one thing, terms such as sin and redemption are particular to the Christian tradition—what Lonergan would call special theological categories—and if they are not to remain

14. George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

simply esoteric, their meaning needs to be elucidated. In his articulation of transcendental or generalized empirical method, Lonergan provides a set of general theological categories with which this task may be accomplished. Furthermore, historical consciousness was alien to the neoscholastic theological context, but by the time he composed his textbook in Christology, Lonergan had already worked out a theological analysis of history in which the interaction of human creativity, sin, and redemption serve to account for the course of human affairs.

Lonergan's theology of history and the articulation of transcendental method on which it rests constitute the broader context within which the meaning of the Law of the Cross can be determined. Once that task of interpretation has been performed, the significance of the order of Lonergan's three soteriological theses becomes clear. Scripture, the material of the first thesis, expresses the meaning of God's salvific intervention in Christ in the common sense discourse of symbolic narrative. Satisfaction, the topic of the second thesis, transposes that meaning into the realm of theory. With the third thesis, in which he proposes the Law of the Cross, Lonergan effects a further transposition, this time into the realm of interiority, in a manner that meets the critical and methodic exigence posed by modernity. With this transposition, he secures the cruciform character of the gift of God's grace in Christ as the central meaning upon which the Christian community is founded, the meaning that guides its redemptive mission. Only through the Law of the Cross can human beings reach the fullness of authentic living. The Law of the Cross opens the path to the freedom necessary to promote progress in the human good and to counter the dynamics of sin that infect societies and their cultures.

A lifetime dedicated to the study of any one of the figures investigated in this volume would be a life well-spent. What animates the present project is the desire to discover how each figure bears witness to the transforming power of God's love enacted and communicated in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus

Christ and the anticipation that the discernment of an order among the ways in which each articulates that witness can both enhance our appreciation of their achievement and clarify the present theological task.